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After Mussolini what?

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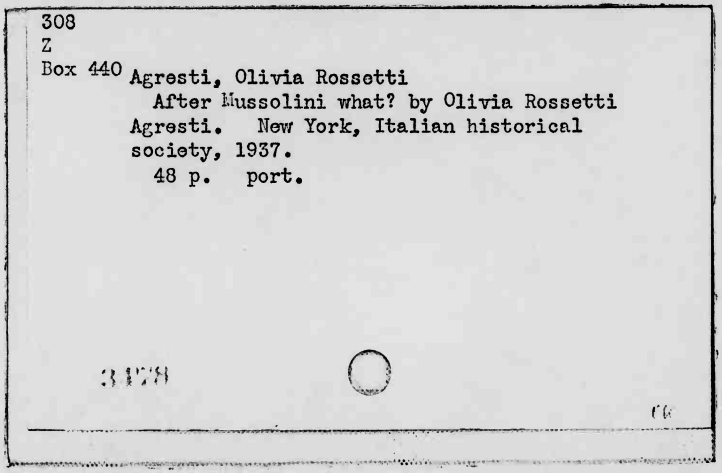

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AFTER MUSSOLINI WHAT?

BY

OLIVIA ROSSETTI AGRESTI

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1937
ITALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEW YORK

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AFTER MUSSOLINI WHAT?

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FOREWORD

The author's title of this publication which the Italian Historical Society is presenting to the English speaking public is: — "The Guild State and Sanctions." *We owe an apology to Signora Olivia Rossetti Agresti for changing it to* "After Mussolini — What?"

The impelling suggestion to change the title came at the first reading of the manuscript. It is audacious, I admit, for the Society to alter even a word of so distinguished a writer whose authority is beyond reproach.

This volume, limited though it is in size, answers squarely the famous question which is hurled repeatedly and insistently from all quarters, particularly from anxious observers of political, social and economic events. After Mussolini — What?

A belief that there can be no successor to Mussolini is almost universal.

At a time when the Head of the Italian Government was in a critical condition of health, he

worked under great pressure to hasten the completion of the reform which is the subject matter of this book, because he was eager to round out the structure of the Fascist State, well aware that it would be indispensable to the salvation of Italy.

That it has already been a salvation is well demonstrated in this essay of Signora Rossetti Agresti.

This reform has been experimented upon, corrected and completed. It is now proven successful and it is to be the Successor to Mussolini. His successor will not be any one individual because there can be but one Mussolini, but his work will continue in the form of the Guild State.

In Rome, during the summer of 1926, I called upon H. E. Alfredo Rocco, then Minister of Justice and one of the pioneers in Fascist philosophy and law, the man who left to the world the magnificent heritage of Fascist jurisprudence. During a friendly conversation, a secretary entered the room submitting to His Excellency an imposing document for signature. The Minister's face lighted up with an expression of inspiration, and, rising to his feet and enunciating sternly, he stated: — "Doctor, it is your good fortune to witness one of the most important events in the world's history! I, as Minister of Justice, am about to sign the Law of the Guilds which will

grant a new era of justice and happiness to humanity." I was moved and awed by the significance and solemnity of the moment. At the termination of the ceremony we shook hands vigorously in a wish for the success of the historical undertaking. Worthy of history the undertaking has proved to be.

It is therefore natural that I should have followed with keen interest the development and the fortunes of the Guild experiment, which was intended to strike boldly and squarely at the root of the most serious problem of the present generation,—the struggle between Capital and Labor.

Ten years have passed since that memorable day, and the people of Italy have carried out their experiment with courage and hope in the face of the skepticism and hostility of a misinformed and misunderstanding world. By a supreme effort of self-sacrifice and self-discipline, the Italian people have successfully emerged from confusion into the realization of a new ideal. In solving their economic problems and saving themselves from the devastation of class war, they have preserved a civilization dear to them.

It is a source of amazement to me that so scant attention is given to this experiment by the outside world. I continue to wonder why the issue is dismissed without due consideration, why it is

so unjustly opposed by people apparently inspired by the same spirit of finding a solution for the pressing problems with which modern industrialism has burdened the present generation:

There is still too much politics in politics.

It was shortly after my visit to Minister Rocco that I was told by a founder of Fascism, who is still a high official of the Italian Government, that in years to come the Italian Experiment of the Guilds and the Russian Experiment would converge to similar points. It is rather rash to recall this statement today, when from Italy and Russia come rumblings foreboding a war of crusaders in which nations would be effaced, and men would sacrifice themselves for an ideal. Stripped of outer semblances and of political entanglements, the Italian and Russian Governments are working toward the same end. That end is—to find an economic, political and social order in substitution for the defeated ideology of the greedy bourgeoisie that we flatter ourselves by calling Democracy. It has served its purpose as well as its time.

Three outstanding facts in the history of the last twenty years are a source of discouragement and chagrin:

1. The useless human sacrifice in the World War, made to end all wars, has left us to-day in

a perplexity nearer to a conflagration than in the spring of 1914.

2. The Russian Revolution, born in an effort to stop the war, has spilled and is ever spilling more and more blood and is, furthermore, preparing armaments on a scale undreamed by any Czar.

3. Just recently, the pacifists and League sanctionists if they had had their way would have rushed us into a general conflagration.

What is the trouble? Who is to blame? Are we not a plaything in the hands of a tragic destiny?

It is gratifying, at my age, when people customarily tire and become skeptical, to find myself constantly filled with enthusiasm. It is the result of an endeavor to avoid fixed ideas which ripen so quickly into prejudice and opposition to any form of change. Not that we should approve or like all changes, but rather that we should be prepared for them and adapt ourselves to progress. With a receptive, open-minded outlook, we should arm ourselves against shocks and be ready to anticipate events.

To walk along with the winds, to scrutinize the dawn of every new day, certainly makes for happiness.

If I have wandered far afield in this introduction to a study of a woman noted for her

stringent logic and scientific mind, for the precise method in which she treats her subjects, I crave pardon. It is because of my desire to prepare and urge readers to approach this short but masterful presentation of Signora Rossetti Agresti with the open-mindedness necessary to appreciate and assimilate the significance and the spirit of every valuable word she has written.

At the same time I hope to have offered a suggestion that will help bewildered students of everchanging political and economic problems to find their solutions through moderation, tolerance and understanding cooperation.

IT IS A GLORIOUS FEELING TO MARCH WITH THE TIMES.

DR. GIUSEPPE PREVITALI
Chairman of the Board of Directors

AFTER MUSSOLINI—WHAT?

Shortly after the day on which I stood on the balcony of the Fascist Confederation of Industrialists facing Palazzo Venezia and heard the Duce proclaim to an immense throng the annexation of Ethiopia I was lunching with a distinguished English journalist on the staff of one of the London dailies most hostile to Italy. He questioned me with curiosity on the Italian industries favored by sanctions, and when in my turn I questioned him on the present English attitude towards my country he replied: "We English are feeling very sore. All our forecasts have been disproved by facts. Our politicians were convinced that Mussolini was a wind-bag and that on the dispatch of the home fleet to the Mediterranean he would collapse. Our newspapers thought that anyhow if he persisted the Italian people, alarmed at England's hostility, would rise and overturn Fascism, our war-office experts knew for certain that a rapid victory in Ethiopia was impossible; our medical experts foresaw that the Italian army

would be decimated by disease; our financial experts were certain that the country would go bankrupt within six months, and we were all convinced that it was impossible that the character of a nation could have been radically modified in the space of fifteen years. We were mistaken on all these points and we must be given time to readjust our opinions." And then after chatting on various matters he remarked with characteristic British egocentricity: "We are much interested in Italy just now; it looks as if she might be a valuable ally in a future war!"

And now sanctions have come to an inglorious end, and not only England but the world at large, which judged Italy exceptionally vulnerable and therefore a particularly good guinea-pig to be laid on the experimental table of the Geneva vivisectionists, stand back and wonder why they failed.

The answer is to be found in the organization and working of the Guild State.

While much has been written about the economic and social changes introduced by the Fascist Regime, yet preconceived notions and political prejudice have led foreign observers to discount the importance of the achievement.

When Mussolini first came into power, the prompt cessation of the social disorders, accompanied by constant strikes and violent attacks on

property, which had been a characteristic post-war phenomenon in Italy, led much foreign opinion to look upon him as the henchman of capital, a belief fostered by the violent anti-fascist attitude taken by organized labor in France and England and by the socialistic trade-union organizations heading up to the Second International with headquarters in Amsterdam.

This attitude, determined by political rather than economic considerations, and also by the fact that former Italian labor-leaders affiliated with the Amsterdam organization were anti-fascists, was reflected in the action taken year after year by the labor representatives at the annual assemblies of the International Labor Office. They refused to recognize the labor delegations sent by Fascist Italy, boycotting them and excluding them from the committees representing working-class interests in the Assembly, regardless of the fact that the syndical (vocational union) Act of April 1926 had given Italian trade - unions legal recognition as the legal representatives of the workers engaged in the activities for which they were formed, and has made collective bargaining between unions of employers and employed the law of the land.

As the system took shape, guided in its development by the declaration of principles laid down in the Labor Charter published on 21st April, 1927,